



TACTICAL

Basic Concepts of Play



REVISED 2/19

OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the conceptual aspect of ice hockey
- To point out that the game can teach the players
- To help coaches teach the players the game as a whole
- To show coaches how to use small games to teach the players in a progressive manner

INTRODUCTION

The most important part of this chapter is the reason a player plays ice hockey—something we, as coaches, sometimes fail to remember or never find out. A player plays hockey because it is fun. It then becomes our job as coaches, parents and administrators to make sure that players don't lose sight of this.

For that reason, we wish to take a different approach to the way we work with beginning players. Let the game teach the player rather than the coach. We have to trust that we are laying the ground work for the player; trying to give the best possible base for him or her to become a good hockey player.

OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

We often talk about practice and the game in terms of offense and defense, as though they are independent parts of the game. We need, instead, to think of offense and defense as a whole or as being the same. We need to teach beginning players that offense works like defense and vice versa.

Let's think about what we try to accomplish on offense or on the attack. One player has the puck. That player must decide to pass the puck or carry the puck. Player number two is looking to be available for a pass or to support player number one. The third player is looking to find space to be available for a pass or to create space for the first two players.

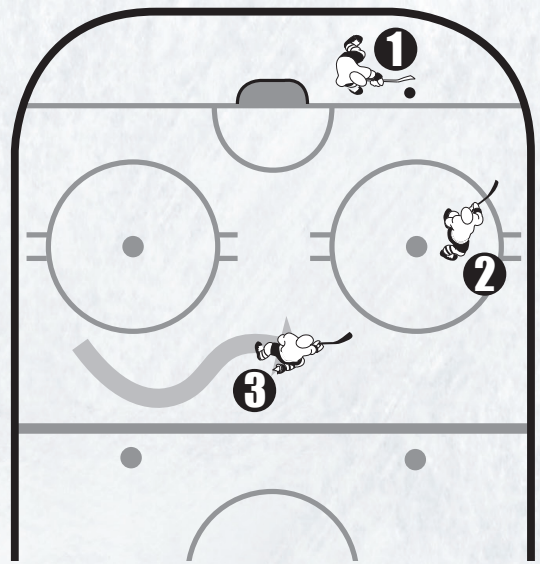


Figure 13-1. 3-on-0 in zone puck and player movement.

If we reverse roles and move to defense, player number one must be concerned with the puck. He must attack or steer the puck to one side, but the focus is the puck, as it is for player number one on offense. Player number two on defense must be concerned with the closest player to the puck who is able to receive a pass. Player number three is looking to cover dangerous areas or players in that area as prime scoring area is an area used to create an attack.

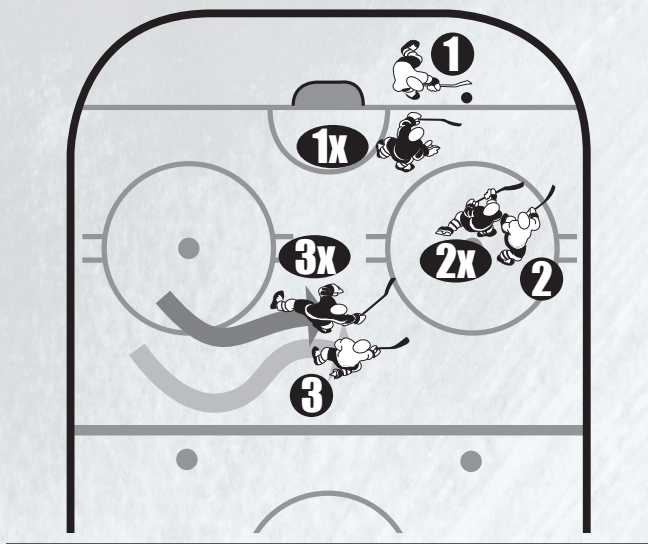


Figure 13-2. 3-on-3 in zone defensive coverage.

If 3-on-3 possession changes, then the roles reverse. Our goal is to create a method of practice to enable beginners to learn what role they must play and how best to accomplish this role while having fun. We can call this the concept of support.

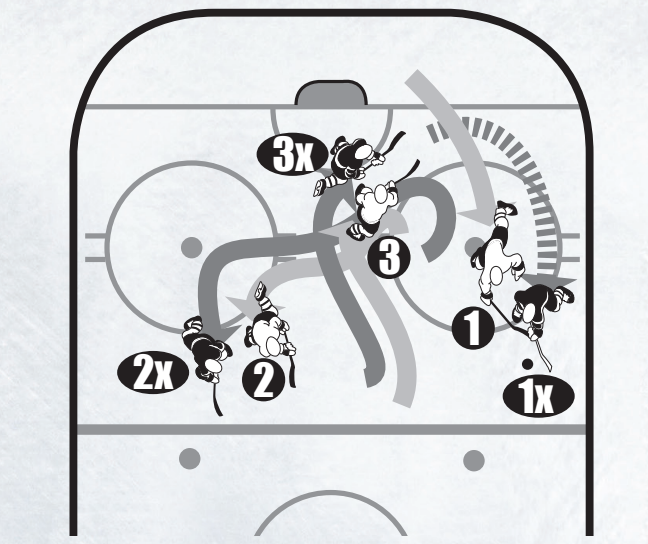


Figure 13-3. 3-on-3 in zone offensive and defensive movement.

SUPPORT

If we try to teach beginners support using the whole ice surface, we will find some big problems. First, some players skate at a higher level and it will be easy for them. It will be difficult for the poor skater,

as he or she will not be able to get to the puck. To make this better for all players, we need to move to a small space. This gives us our method of practice. As we said earlier, we were going to let the game be the teacher.

So the game becomes small-sided games in a small space. An example might be placing the net on the side boards and playing 3-on-3. What we can accomplish with these games is more players touching the puck and more possession changes, which result in quicker transitions from offense to defense. This also results in the players seeing more opportunities. But even more important is the fact that more players have the opportunity to score goals. If you are the parent of a beginner or have the opportunity to be around after practice, players can all tell you how many goals they have scored. You only have to look in their eyes to know how much they love to score. If we can allow the game to be fun, then we may see more success at higher levels.

PROGRESSIONS

Let's take a look at the way that we may want to build our games in a teaching progression.

If we start by playing 2-on-0 within a faceoff circle, with no rules, then move to 3-on-0 with no rules except to stay inside the circle, we have started to move the players together in a group with no rules.

Next, by playing keep-away 2-on-1 inside a faceoff circle with a pylon at the edge of the circle, we have introduced defense. The goal of the game is to carry the puck and touch the pylon. We can then start teaching that two players must work together to keep the puck from one player. You may want to add a point system or announce that the player who wins the puck can move to the offensive side. We should talk to the players about their individual roles. If we think about the roles, we would discover that the role of the first player with the puck is to get the puck to player two or to get free. Player two is trying to find an open space to receive a pass or to draw the defensive player over to cover him and give player one a chance to be free. The defensive player is, of course, trying to gain the puck, and he or she will be taking space away.

We have started our players thinking about space and support with a simple small game. We can then add or subtract players within the same game.

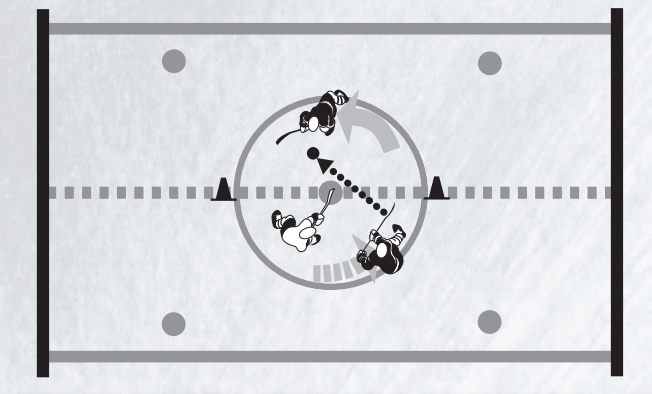


Figure 13-4. 2-on-1 in the faceoff circle.

We can then play 5-on-5 keep-away with three pucks. For scoring, the team that has two or more pucks would receive a point.



Figure 13-5. 5-on-5 in the zone, using three pucks.

Our next game, 6-on-3, arranged in the end zone, places three players on one board and three on the opposite side with a field made using four pylons. The object of the game is for the three offensive

players on one side to pass the puck through the pylons to the three players on the other side. The rules for the defensive players are:

- two players must always be in the rectangle formed by the pylons
- one player may chase the puck
- As the puck changes sides, the chaser may come back in the rectangle and replace one teammate, who then chases.



Figure 13-6. 6-on-3 in the zone, using one puck and four obstacles.

GAME-LIKE CONDITIONS

We now need to allow players to play with more game-like conditions. We can move the nets to an area close to the boards, perhaps to the corner. We will now play 2-on-1 with a goal, but the area must be small. You can control the game by keeping a puck in play at all times. When a goal is scored or a puck is out of play, put a new puck into play right away. You can add players to make a 3-on-2 scenario or whatever combination you wish. You may wish to make certain players stationary passers only. On the defensive side, try 1-on-2 and 2-on-3 to let the defensive players learn who to react to as a group.

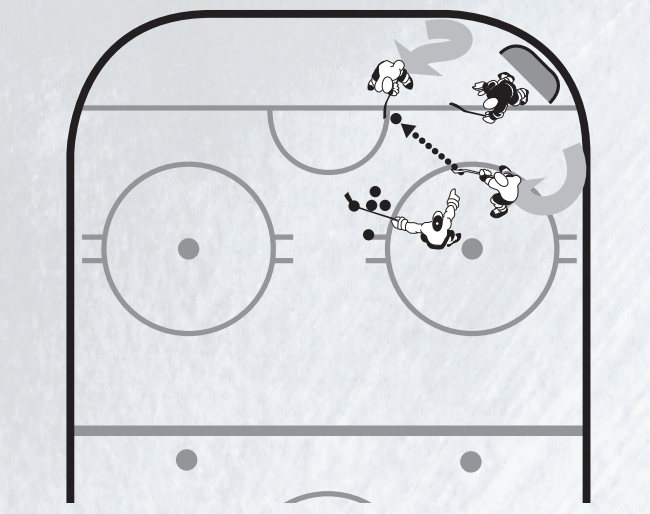


Figure 13-7. 2-on-1 confined to a restricted space (corner).

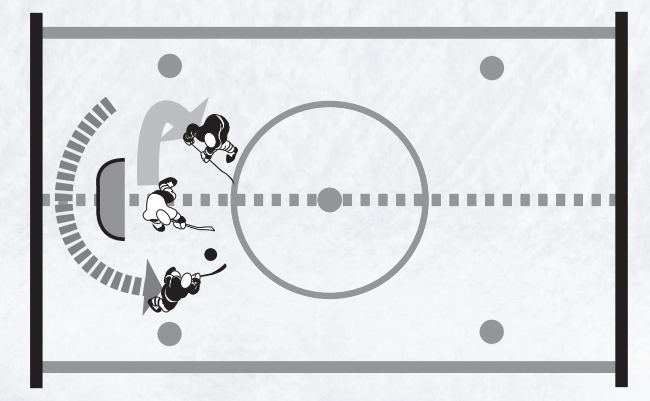


Figure 13-8. 2-on-1 confined to a restricted area (center ice).



Figure 13-9. 2-on-1 and 3-on-3 in the same zone, each using half of a zone.

If we now consider our play zone from the blue line in, we can start to play games with two nets. For the first game, we will place our nets on the faceoff dots facing each other. We will play 2-on-2 the players can score on either net. You may wish to get some old fire hoses and run them behind the net to keep the puck in play or you may place players along an imaginary line extending out from the goal to keep the puck in play. You again will be controlling the game by feeding new pucks in as they go out of play or are scored. Allow play to go for 30 seconds to one minute. You may wish to add players to this game. In all of these games in which we use two nets, you may want to have the players touch the puck twice and then they must pass the puck.

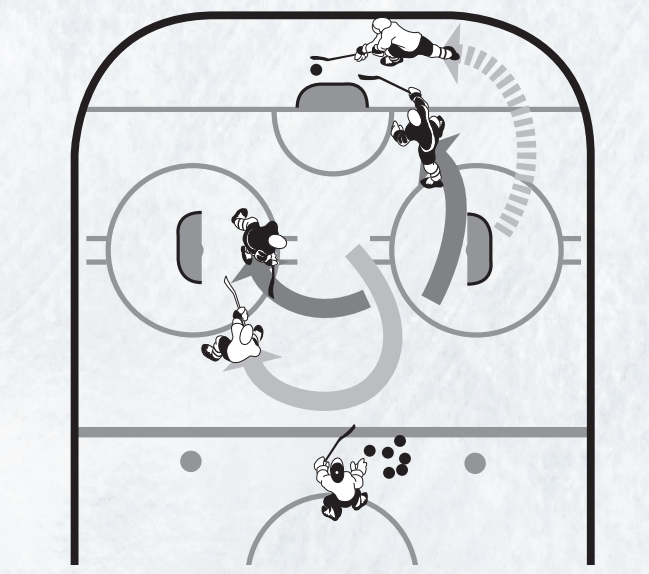


Figure 13-10. 2-on-2 in zone using three nets.

Next we can move to a game of 3-on-3. In this game, one team is placed along the blue line and the other along the goal line extended. We play a regular game, with one rule change: players may use their teammates on the side lines to pass to. You may want to institute the two-touch rule.

The last game is 3-on-3 with the nets back-to-back. If you place the nets in the middle of any zone with the goal mouth facing the boards, you can then play 3-on-3, with scoring on either net, or any other rules you may wish to use. The value of this game lies in the decisions that must be made to play offense or defense, the kinds of passes that must be made, and the fun of scoring.

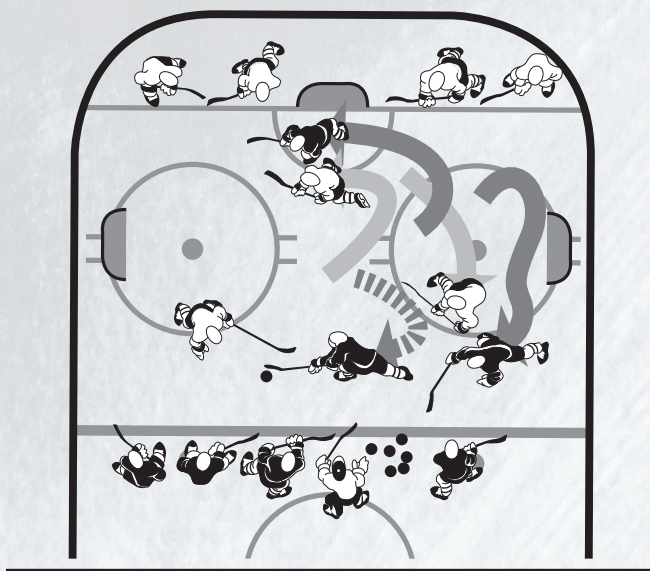


Figure 13-11. 3-on-3 in zone using three nets.

SUMMARY

These are examples of the types of games that can be played. If we look at them closely, we find that we have not placed a lot of rules on the players and have allowed them to learn through playing. This is the real secret to developing players. Place them in situations that allow the player to make the choice to think and develop skills. While developing your games, remember that it is important to set goals for your games and to stay close to those goals. In other words, don't change your mind in the middle of the game.

Remember, what we suggested are the basic building blocks of team play for an ice hockey player. We have used all of the skills necessary to be a good hockey player. We have placed the player in a position of having to move from offense to defense quickly and to make decisions on how to support each other. At the intermediate level, we will build on this. These concepts are extremely important and, once mastered, any system of team play can be implemented.